NATURE'S AID TO DESIGN

A Source Book For Artists And Guide For Nature Lovers

BY LOUISE W. BUNCE
AND E. S. D. OWEN

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A SOURCE BOOK FOR ARTISTS AND A GUIDE FOR NATURE LOVERS

BY
Esther Sargent Dilwell
E. S. D. OWEN
AND
LOUISE W. BUNCE

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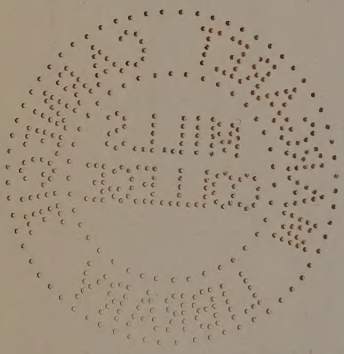

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NATURE'S AID TO DESIGN

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By E. S. D. OWEN *and* LOUISE W. BUNCE

FIGURE 1

FIGURE 2

NATURE sets before us multitudes of simple forms from which to study, and has done so from the first seen lotus and papyrus to the last discovered botanical specimen, but, if we do not show her truthful elements of growth, in no matter what species, be they bulbous or weedy, we have slandered Nature and succeeded in presenting only worthless design.

To illustrate our point, we could mention the case of a student at one of our schools, who, being required recently to submit in class a Dutch landscape from memory, brought in a sketch, good in color, in perspective, in detail as to placing of houses and indispensable windmills, but with a tree whose inspiration was the American elm. The comment of his teacher was, "You should study Nature." It is not possible for all of us to go to Nature in the fields, but Nature may come to us. With such aid as is here offered, a moment's search will yield the material sought for, and the artist, with all the inspiration he needs, can work out his conventionalized design untrammeled.

An instructor's idea of proper growth, based on long familiarity and experience in the study of his subject, is sufficient oftentimes to his needs, but how about those in the class who are in the alphabet of experience, and the designer whose subjects for study are far from his workshop and needed immediately for composition? Should not Nature, in exact reproduction, be brought to them?

FIGURE 3

Any photographic work up to the present time has failed, in that the pictures are taken from either a photographer's or an amateur's point of view merely, without thought as to the artistic working possibilities. With an artist at the camera, thoroughly understanding the work, the light so arranged as to bring out all that is to be found in form and texture, the whole object takes on individuality, a living, glowing, absolute help, not a something which only suggests. The suggestive element in any specific treatment may always come in its proper place, according to the ability and inspiration of the worker. The method thus used of perfect reproduction, as we introduce it here, appeals already to artists, art teachers and designers who are seeking for such tangible material.

There is a great need in our art schools of authentic copy: flowers and flower forms from which to design for all artistic trade use. One needs a reference, without the delay of seeking the real flower, generally not procurable on the instant, which reference would prevent the painful

FIGURE 4

mistakes so often made through ignorance of details. An example of such error may be found in a design of a rose with violet leaves and a blackberry stem, recently brought to our notice. Inasmuch as it is impossible for the student, still less the graduate worker, to fare forth after the very forms he hungers to adapt, the value of this material becomes apparent.

In contrast to the ignorant method of design alluded to above, turn to the bloodroot, as illustrated in Fig. 5, filled to the brim with suggestion for design; its blossom standing as Nature planned, a perfect tile, its sheathed leaf growth and mature leaf full of good form and artistic possibilities, and its bud the near kin, in miniature, of the Egyptian lotus. There is abundant material for idealization or actual repeat in any of its component parts. The lady's-slipper, Figs. 6 and 7, and the tulip, Fig. 8, still further convince us how necessary it is to know the proper growth of these two plants to reproduce them correctly. How rich each is in suggestion for design!

If we take up the study of the lily, a flower familiar to all art workers, we find, as shown in the foregoing illustration, No. 1, the opportunity for design from any one of its parts, and the camera aids us to reproduce those parts and bring them within reach of the art student or designer correctly. Referring again to the lily and to Fig. 2, what is more beautiful, suggestive and applicable to artistic treatment than the simple and masterful grace of its growth, and what more necessary in art production than that the form, whether in natural or conventional treatment, should be preserved truthfully? Figures 3 and 4 but enlarge the point we make; Fig. 4, a cross section of the stem, especially suggesting rosette ornament, which reaches as well into textile design, silks and other printed materials, book covers and wall paper, as into ceramic art and finally into the realm of the worker in stained glass and metal.

Bearing in mind and referring continually to the illustrative photographs, study for a moment behind the presented picture to discover the value of the skeleton as absolutely necessary for work in design, and see in the accompanying plates the wonderful opportunity for building up, according to the artisan's originality, design suggested by Nature's mere framework. One has but to compare these presented possibilities with the copy set in art schools of the present, both in kindergarten and advanced classes, to realize their worth. Observe a pupil studying for the first time in the object class. He may and does find it a comparatively simple matter to draw a form bending to left or right in his composition, but his pencil is stopped when he tries to make a leaf or flower bend toward

FIGURE 5

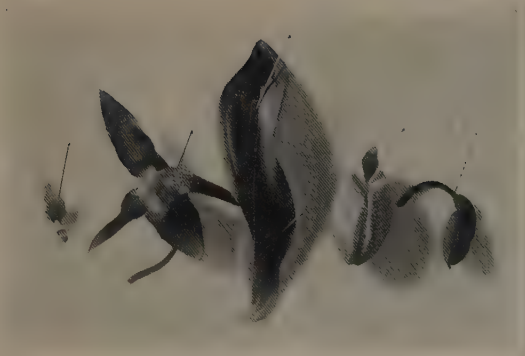

FIGURE 7

FIGURE 8

him—that is, out of the flat. Let him refer to the photograph, study it with the object, and his difficulty is solved, for there, *on the flat*, by aid of the natural shadow, stands out his form, and he has but to study it to master thoroughly the difficulty. One cannot lay too much stress on the value of such help, as will be apparent to any who have had similar struggles—saving of brain fatigue, discouragement and despair to the faithful student! Note Fig. 8: not only does the photograph push forward the leaf in high light, but also, by its depth of shadow, it sends back the growth of that same leaf at its stem; result—form, perspective, high light and shadow from a leaf whose inner edge lies almost along the plane while its outer edge stands well out of the flat. The value to the student is apparent and the work indispensable. There are a thousand such proofs that Nature's material is unlimited. As an example of this, turn from any one of the foregoing plates to Fig. 9, and see at once the paperlike texture shown in this photograph of the jonquil.

And here comes a new field of study, texture. We have spoken of the value of form and perspective. It is quite as necessary to reproduce texture correctly, for the sake of the flower when working in black

FIGURE 6

FIGURE 9

and white, but preeminently for the sake of variety in design when working in color. That photography is necessarily art we do not say, but as a wonderful help to the tottering footsteps, leading to art's high places, we bespeak the importance of such reproductions. In art we must seek for that which makes our picture, or design, with the fewest lines, that which tells our wonderful tale in the fewest words. Every stroke we need we shall find in the photograph just as surely as we shall in the actual flower; only we have it trapped, as it were, for our constant help to be sought and used when we wish.

These varied arguments but go to prove, over and over again, the importance of Nature brought home in perfect detail. Study and memory do not avail; we may store our minds with what valuable data they may contain concerning forms within our reach, and still our lives would not be long enough, even could our knowledge be so great, as to embrace the material offered us with each season and climate. Nature must come to us from bud to seed pod and be at all times within our grasp.

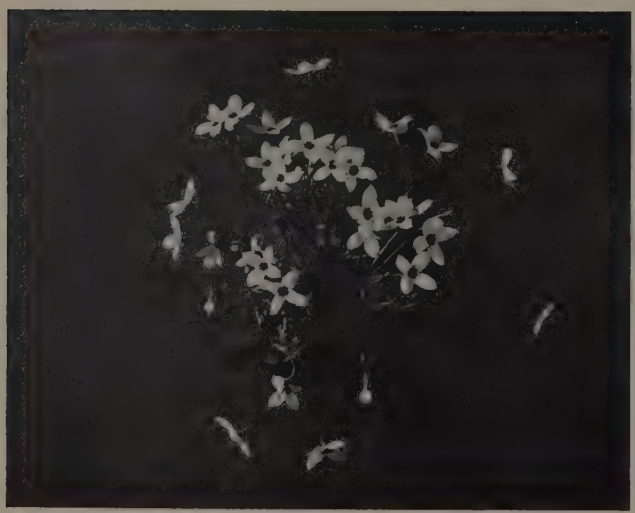

PLATE I.—AMARYLLIS

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PLATE IV.—AZALEA (*wild*)

PLATE V.—BEAN (*Scarlet Runner*)

PLATE VI.—BLOODROOT

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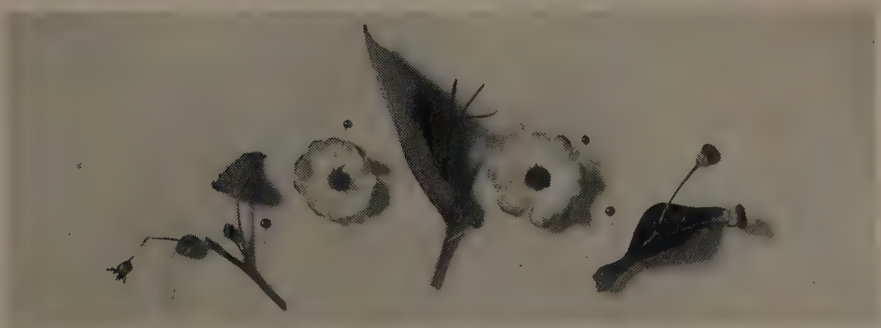

PLATE XIII.—CLINTONIA

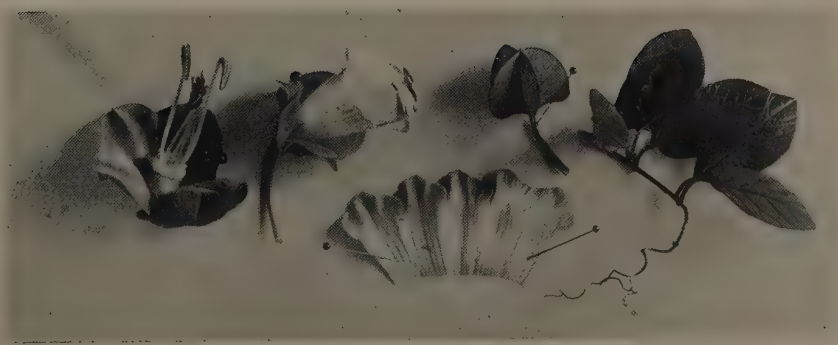

PLATE XV.—COLUMBINE

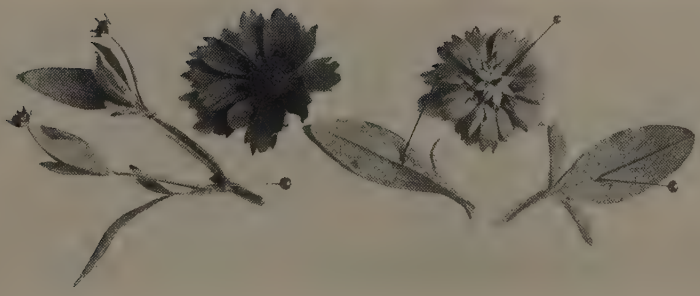

PLATE XIX.—DAFFODIL (*double*)

PLATE XX.—DAFFODIL (*single*)

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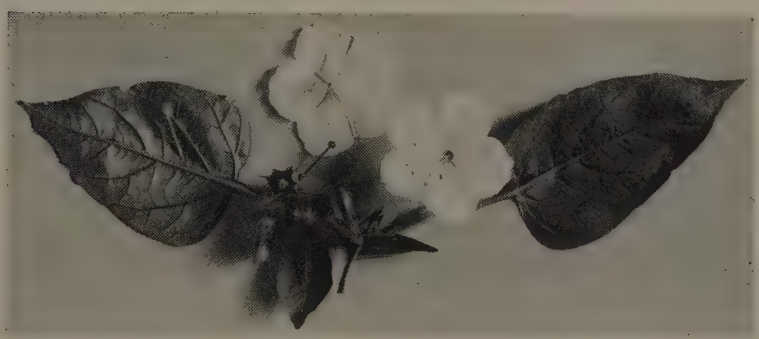
PLATE XXIII.—FERN



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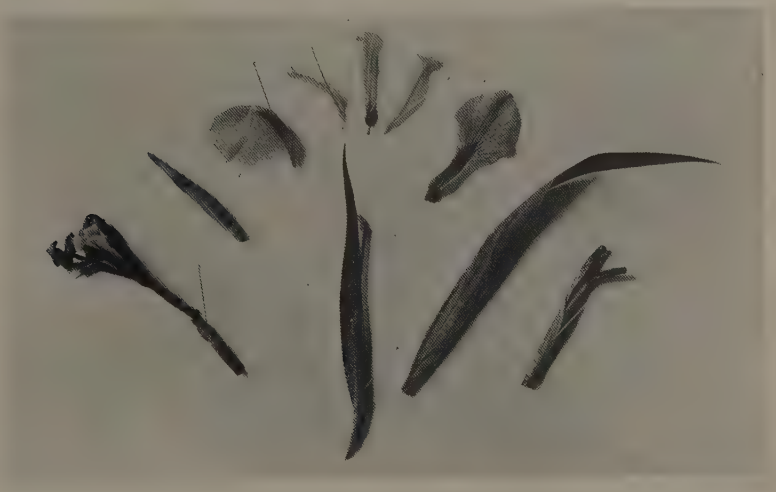

PLATE XXXV.—IRIS (*blue flag*)

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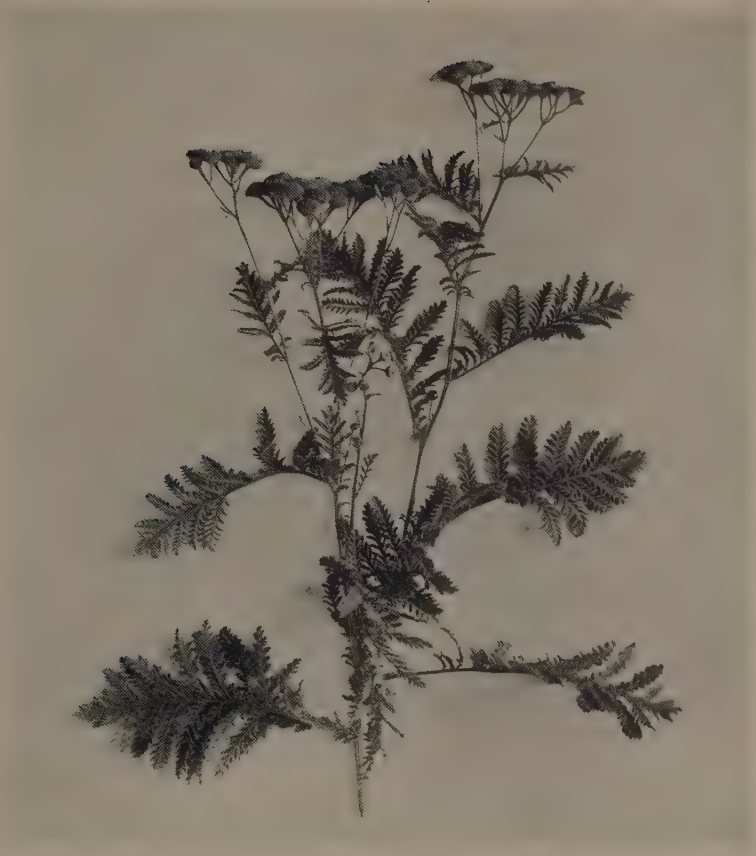
PLATE LXXII.—SQUASH (*vine*)

PLATE LXXIII.—SUNFLOWER

PLATE LXXIV.—SWEET-FERN (*shrub*)



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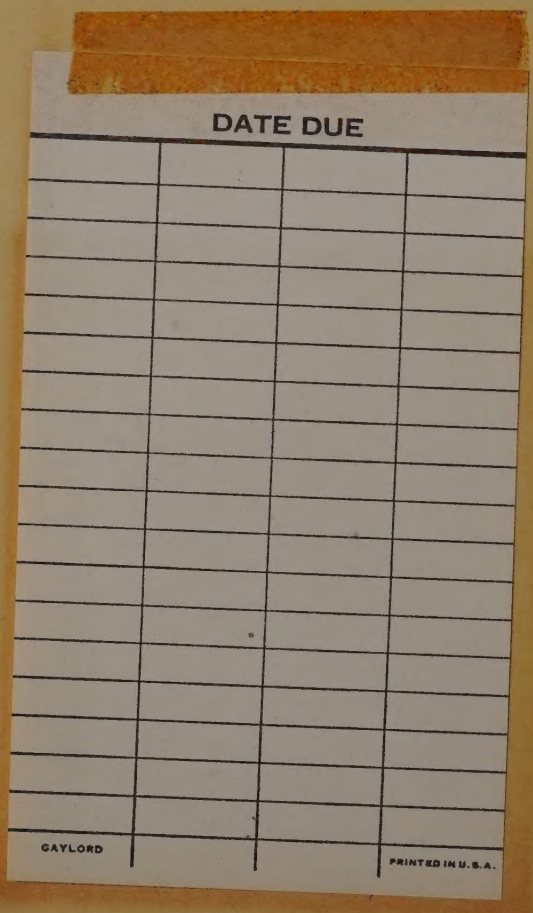
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